

382-Year-Old Bell Rung at Mission to Hail Killing of Shark

Traveler Tells of Relics He Found on Trip to Lower California

This is another in a series written for The Star by Randolph Leigh, McLean, Va., writer and traveler, who leads an expedition exploring little-known regions of the Gulf of California. A party of scientists and technicians sailed from Norfolk, Va., last December aboard the schooner Lascar II, which is being used as base for their operations.

By RANDOLPH LEIGH.

LORETO, Lower California, March 1 (By Mail).—Today we visited the half-ruined mission of Loreto, one of the important relics of Spanish glory in America. There we saw the oldest bell in America, made in Bruges, Belgium, in 1559 to celebrate the first marriage of Philip II of Spain and long afterward sent to this distant coast by a Spanish Queen who was one of the chief patrons of the missions in Lower California.

The bell is one of five hung upon the roof of the mission. They are suspended by chains attached to a crude arrangement of posts and a huge oaken cross beam. The bell is entirely gone and with it, of course, the original arrangement which sustained them. The Bruges bell is in almost as good condition as the three best of the others. The fifth bell, smallest of all, is in very bad condition, broken and eaten away by the elements. It looks as if it had been for a time in salt water. Perhaps it was used as a ship's bell, as it is only about 14 inches high and was left in the water for a time when the vessel went to pieces.

The Bruges bell is 22 inches in height and well shaped. It is used now occasionally to announce the killing of an unusually big shark. I was informed by a native. The largest bell is 32 inches in height. The bells must not have been exposed in the open air for many years, although the air here is so clear and the rainfall so light that it is possible that they have been there longer than one would imagine from their condition.

Walls 3 Feet Thick.
The dates on the other sound bells are 1738, 1742 and 1743. As the Loreto mission, the oldest one in either of the Californias, was founded in 1697, it is evident that they were a later acquisition. The smallest bell is in such condition that it is impossible to read its inscription.

Most of the principal chapel of the mission is still in rather good condition. That is to say, the walls are intact and only about one-sixth of the roof is gone. Basilica-like in general design, that part of the mission is 160 feet long, 30 feet wide and 42 feet high. The walls are 3 feet thick and are of flat Roman bricks, similar to those in the Pantheon, combined with large native stones. In accordance with the prevailing Spanish technique, the interstices of the large stones were partly chinked up with small stones, to save mortar.

The roof is flat, being sustained on its underside by handsome cedar beams, carved, but with elegant restraint. Their brackets, also of wood, are well carved. Above these beams

is a concrete ceiling, and on top of that a roof of tiles laid flat.

So sturdy is the workmanship in stone and brick that the archway for one of the large side doors still sustains the tons of masonry above it despite the fact that vandals have taken away half of its strength by removing many of the facing stones of the arch. About two-thirds of the original quadrangle of the entire mission remains standing, much of it, however, badly broken down and roofless. The buildings are entirely unprotected, in the sense that nothing is locked and any one can wander about at will. However, nothing about the structure can be purchased, although the community in which it is located is a poor one.

Notable for Rectory.

Two days ago we visited another of these missions, namely, the one at Mulege. Not quite as large as Loreto and far simpler, Mulege mission is, nevertheless, imposing. It stands upon a small hill, overlooking a beautiful green valley, through which flows the Rio Santa Rosalia. Its most important architectural feature is the large but splendidly proportioned rectory, with its graceful barrel-vaulted ceiling. The chapel and rectory are undamaged as to their roof and walls. The tile floors, however, are gone, and wanderers have built their campfires on the subfloors.

The village of Mulege is located 2 miles up the river, which flows into the Gulf of California. This broad, rather shallow Rio Santa Rosalia winds between plantations of tall date palms. Along each side of the stream is a good dirt road.

Totally ignorant of the fact that Mulege would be considered a port of entry and would have customs and other officials, we anchored the Lascar II at the mouth of the stream and started toward the village in our skiff, Forty Knots. We noticed a tall man, dressed in black,

who mounted a small horse as we passed into the river. Seeing him wave to us, we waved back and, innocently putting the lever of the outboard motor higher, rushed on against the current.

After a few minutes we saw clouds of dust rising along the bank of the stream on which we had seen the horseman. Behind the dust, and making more of it, were many boys and girls, shouting and waving. Finally, coming around a bend in the stream we confronted the horseman, who had taken a short cut and was at the water's edge, holding his arm up authoritatively. The captain of the port, apparently, had come out to board us on horseback, an entirely novel experience to add to the many odd ones which I have had in dealing with port authorities in the last few months. He, however, was as cordial as unconventional and later posed for his picture and acted as general adviser as to seeing the sights in the vicinity.

Mulege, by the way, has an immense citadel prison, built long ago by the Spaniards, and now used as a corral for horses. The community gives evidence of having had civilizing influences in it for a long time. There is an excellent and ancient irrigation system, and in several spots there are well-trained and carefully tended grape vines which are from 75 to 100 years old.

We plan to visit other missions, 25 or 30 miles away over a mountain trail, on muleback.

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